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RUEHLN/AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG 0026
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KYIV 0016
RUEHSK/AMEMBASSY MINSK 0001
RUEHTL/AMEMBASSY TALLINN 0031
RUEHVL/AMEMBASSY VILNIUS 4083
RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT 2674
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC
RHFJUSC/HQS US CUSTOMS SERVICE WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 RIGA 000051

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/VO BILL BEARDSLEE, LAURA STEIN, AND BRENDA GREWE
DEPT ALSO FOR CA/FPP SETH BILLINGS
FRANKFURT FOR RCO KERRY BROUGHAM AND CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION
DHS HEADQUARTERS FOR EMILY HYMOWITZ
MOSCOW FOR FPM ERIN EUSSEN AND NIV CHIEF PHIL SKOTTE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LATVIA: MORE CHARGES LIKELY AS POLICE CONTINUE PASSPORT
FRAUD INVESTIGATION

REF: 08 RIGA 23

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 21 we met with the Latvian Security Police to discuss a two-year passport fraud investigation. Officials confirmed that 10 suspects have been charged, and more indictments are expected. The Government of Latvia (GOL) confirmed that 144 false identities were created and shared the actual biographical information of foreign nationals who fraudulently obtained the Latvian passports. Previously, it appeared that Latvian authorities were only targeting corrupt officials for prosecution and planned to merely recover and cancel the fraudulent documents, but it is now clear that all who obtained these passports could face prosecution in Latvia that would also meet the threshold for U.S. visa ineligibilities. Latvian officials understand the importance of document security with regard to LatviaQs participation in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). This far-reaching investigation and willingness to share data underscores that the GOL continues to take this matter seriously. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On January 12, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the consular section with information about four new criminal cases filed between September and November 2009 pertaining to a high-profile passport fraud scheme that was uncovered in late 2007, shortly before Latvia was admitted into the VWP (reftel). The Regional Security Office separately received an updated list of the fraudulent passports which authorities have identified. On January 21 we met with senior Latvian Security Police officials, including the lead investigator, to discuss the status of the case. Police officials confirmed that, in addition to the four recently filed criminal cases, six other individuals have been charged in separate cases in connection with fraudulently obtaining genuine Latvian passports. The police officials confirmed that the investigation is continuing and that evidence is being analyzed on a case-by-case basis, often involving the assistance of handwriting experts or other forensic specialists. Thus, while it is difficult to determine how many individuals will ultimately face criminal charges, the police indicated that anyone who was involved in the selling or the purchase of the fraudulent identities is fair game.

13. (SBU) The Security Police confirmed that a total of 144 false identities were created in the Population Register of Latvia between 2002 and 2006 before the fraud scheme was uncovered, and passports were issued in all of these identities. The number of identities does not exactly line up with the number of passports issued because some travelers were issued multiple passports (for example, if they subsequently registered a marriage and obtained a new passport in the married name or if they filled the pages from travel). Latvian authorities shared the most updated list showing the names of the false identities and, for 66 of the passports, the corresponding real biographic information for those who purchased the passports and may face criminal charges. (Note: There were some discrepancies in separate lists received from the GOL over the past two years, and the Security Police pledged to provide post with a further updated list for use in consolidating information and creating substantive visa lookout entries. End note.)

14. (SBU) The police officials also provided assurances that, although a total of 108 passport books have not been physically recovered, all fraudulent passports have been invalidated via the Interpol and Schengen reporting systems. The corresponding real names have not yet been identified for 78 fraudulently issued passports, but authorities have determined the real identities for the remainder. According to the law enforcement officials, the majority of the passports were obtained by affluent Russian citizens who wanted an EU passport for travel purposes, although the police reported that citizens of Belarus, Ukraine, Israel, and Lithuania were also involved in the fraud scheme. The police confirmed that large bribes were paid to secure the fraudulent passports, and emboffs heard anecdotal reports of payments of up to USD 100,000 for

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the passports. The high price these genuine documents commanded underscores the affluence of the suspects in this investigation. The Security Police noted that charges thus far have focused on fraud and forgery, but suggested that additional charges could be filed against the passport recipients for the bribery associated with obtaining the travel documents.

Comment:

15. (SBU) Up until now, it was postQs understanding that Latvian authorities were only targeting the Latvian bureaucrats and ringleaders who issued the fraudulent passports for prosecution and that police were content to merely recover and cancel the ill-begotten passports. It is now clear that criminal charges are possible for many or all of the people who paid large sums for these fraudulent travel documents, and the recently filed charges over the past few months demonstrate that the two-year long investigation indeed continues and is yielding results. The participation of the Chief and Deputy Chief of the responsible Latvian Security Police unit in this meeting with emboffs and their willingness to share data with post also demonstrates that Latvia is taking document security issues seriously, and officials are mindful that it is an important element of the countryQs participation in the Visa Waiver Program. Most of the passport holders reside abroad, but even if suspects agree to pay a fine as part of a guilty plea if they are charged, there could be a substantial number of affluent and possibly influential persons facing future criminal eligibilities for U.S. visas.

Visa Lookout Entries:

16. (SBU) When post obtained the first lists of fraudulent identities from the GOL in early 2008, consular staff promptly entered P6C misrepresentation lookouts into the CLASS system. However, when some of the holders of the fraudulent passports subsequently applied for U.S. visas, it was noted that there was no basis for a hard 6C ineligibility as the passports were never used to obtain a U.S. immigration benefit. The P6C lookouts were also based on the fraudulent identities and were not linked to the real identities of those who obtained the passports, which in many instances still remains unknown. Since Latvian authorities have invalidated the

passports electronically and the criteria for 6C misrepresentation as established in the Immigration and Nationality Act is not met, post will seek to remove the P6C lookouts via CLOK in coordination with the Visa Office. However, QLQ lookouts will be entered for all fake identities involving passports which have not been physically recovered, which will ensure that adjudicating consular officers are alerted in the event one of these passports is presented in conjunction with a visa application.

17. (SBU) Post will follow up with the Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection to ensure that the Latvian efforts to invalidate the documents were sufficient to alert U.S. port of entry inspectors should any of the unrecovered fraudulent passports be presented for admission to the U.S. via the Visa Waiver Program. On January 26 the consular section searched the Consular Consolidated Database (CCD) and confirmed that no visas have been issued for any of the known fraudulent identities. There were several new fraudulent names on the most recent list which had not previously been provided by Latvian law enforcement and therefore had no CLASS lookouts, so conoff checked the DHS Arrival Departure Information System (ADIS) to confirm that none of these fraudulent identities had been used to enter the United States. New QL lookouts will be added for these identities as well. We are also expecting Latvian authorities to provide information on approximately 20 additional fraudulent identities (of the 144 reported) that we have not received thus far.

18. (SBU) Since there is a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may eventually be filed against all known subjects who

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obtained fraudulent Latvian passports, post will enter possible P2A1 ineligibilities for moral turpitude in the CLASS system for the 66 real identities that have been revealed to date. These entries would alert consular officers to possible pending criminal cases in Latvia should the same subjects apply for U.S. visas at any embassy or consulate. Those charged in the four criminal cases shared by the MFA have already been entered, but the Security Police agreed to provide information about the other six confirmed indictments filed thus far. Post will upgrade these lookouts to hard category one hits for moral turpitude as information about convictions becomes available since all applicable statutes in the Latvian criminal code carry possible prison sentences of one year or more in prison and meet the criteria for a visa ineligibility.

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